

## Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 LA PAZ 05180 302231Z  
ACTION SS-25

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S E C R E T LA PAZ 5180

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, BL  
SUBJ: POSSIBILITIES OF ELECTORAL FRAUD

REF: STATE 165645

1. I HAD A TWO-HOUR LUNCH AT THE RESIDENCE ON JUNE 30 WITH ELECTORAL COURT PRESIDENT JULIO MANTILLA AND HIS VICE PRESIDENT, MARCELLO CESPEDES. AS BEST I AND MY ASSOCIATES CAN TELL, THESE TWO, PICKED FROM THE PRIVATE SECTOR FOR THIS DUTY AND WIDELY RESPECTED FOR THEIR INTEGRITY, ARE HONEST, CONSCIENTIOUS MEN DEDICATED TO ASSURING THE FAIREST ELECTIONS POSSIBLE. THEY ARE ALSO UNDER ENORMOUS PRESSURES WHICH, JUDGING FROM THEIR DECISIONS SO FAR, THEY HAVE RESISTED SUCCESSFULLY. (EXAMPLE: DESPITE GREAT PRESSURE TO AWARD THE PINK BALLOT --THE MNR'S TRADITIONAL COLOR--TO PEREDA AND HIS MNR SUPPORTERS, MANTILLA AWARDED IT TO VICTOR PAZ.) MANTILLA, WHO IS SUFFERING FROM A POSSIBLY TERMINAL DISEASE, SAYS HE IS DETERMINED TO COMPLETE THIS LAST TASK FOR BOLIVIA, CESPEDES, HIS LONG-TIME ASSOCIATE IN PRIVATE BUSINESS, SAYS EVEN IF HE LIVES TO BE 90, HE WILL BE UNABLE AND UNWILLING TO HOLD ANY PUBLIC OFFICE AFTER COMPLETING THIS BRUISING TASK.

2. MANTILLA SAID HE AND CESPEDES HAD CHOSEN TO CARRY OUT THEIR  
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TASK IN LONELY INDEPENDENCE FROM THE GOVERNMENT'S APPARATUS. THE REAL AUTHORITY AND POWER HE SAID THEY HAD WAS THEIR INDEPENDENCE, COMBINED WITH THE THREATS TO RESIGN IN THE FACE OF INTENDED FRAUD OR TO REFUSE TO AUTHENTICATE THE ELECTION RESULT IF IT WERE TAINTED BY FRAUD. HE SAID THEY WERE NOT GOING TO BE ABLE TO ELIMINATE FRAUD, BUT HE HAD HIGH HOPES OF REDUCING FRAUDELENT VOTES TO A HISTORICAL LOW-WHICH HE QUANTIFIED AS LESS THAN

30,000 VOTES. HE SAID THEY WERE DEALING WITH REGISTRATION FRAUD AS FOLLOWS:

--TOWNS WHICH REPORTED SIGNIFICANTLY MORE REGISTRATIONS THAN ADULT POPULATION, ACCORDING TO THE CENSUS, WERE HAVING ALL REGISTRATIONS ANNULLED;

--TO THE EXTENT POSSIBLE, REGISTRATION LISTS WERE BEING CHECKED TO CANCEL DOUBLE REGISTRATIONS;

--IN RESPONSE TO TALES OF MULTIPLE REGISTRATIONS BY MILITARY RECRUITS (WHO ARE NOT ELIGIBLE TO VOTE) HE HAD GOTTEN THE ARMED FORCES TO ASSURE THAT ALL PERSONNEL WOULD BE CONFINED TO POST ON ELECTION DAY.

THE ELEMENT, ACCORDING TO CESPEDES, THAT COULD NOT BE CONTROLLED COMPLETELY WAS REGISTRATION UNDER MORE THAN ONE NAME BY CITIZENS WHO DID NOT HAVE AN IDENTITY CARD.

3. I TOLD THEM THAT WHAT CONCERNED ME WAS CENTRALLY DIRECTED FRAUD FROM THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR. I ASKED MANTILLA NAD CESPEDES IF THEY KNOW SOMEONE NAMED ABASTO. CESPEDES SAID YES, ABASTO WAS A CROOK AND SPECIALIST IN RIGGED ELECTIONS DURING THE MNR YEARS. CESPEDES AND MANTILLA HAD FORBIDDEN ANYONE ON THEIR STAFF FROM HAVING ANY CONTACT WITH HIM. THEY HAD HEARD THAT ABASTO WAS NOW HEADING A COMMITTEE IN THE INTERIOR MINISTRY. I SAID INDEED HE WAS AND I WAS VERY CONCERNED ABOUT THIS. I THOUGHT SOMEONE HAD TO TAKE THIS UP WITH THE MINISTER. THIS OPERATION SHOULD BE STOPPED NOW. MANTILLA SAID HE WOULD DO WHAT HE COULD, BUT HE PREFERRED TO STAY AWAY FROM THE MINISTER  
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AND RELY ON HIS INDEPENDENCE AND THREAT TO DISQUALIFY THE ELECTION RESULT.

4. MANTILLA SAID HE AND CESPEDES HAD DISCUSSED THIS GENERAL SUBJECT AT GREAT LENGTH AND HAD REACHED TWO FIRM CONCLUSIONS.

--THEY COULD NOT CONTROL ALL FRAUD AND WOULD BE MOST GRATIFIED IF IT COULD BE REDUCED TO A LOW LEVEL. THIS ELECTION COULD BE A BIG STRIDE TOWARD FULL DEMOCRACY IN BOLIVIA, BUT NOT THE END OF THAT JOURNEY.

--IF THE EXTENT OF FRAUD THEY DETECTED WAS CLOSE TO THE WINNER'S MARGIN OF VICTORY, THEY WOULD DENOUNCE THE RESULT AND REFUSE TO AUTHENTICATE IT.

5. THEY BOTH SAID THEY WOULD TAKE THIS LATTER STEP WITH HEAVY HEART SINCE IT COULD MEAN VIOLENCE AND FOUR MORE YEARS OF MILITARY RULE, BUT THEY WERE DETERMINED TO DO IT. MANTILLA AND CESPEDES SAID THEY WERE CONCERNED BUT AS OF NOW THOUGHT THEY PROBABLY WOULD NOT HAVE TO TAKE THIS STEP. THEY ASKED ME IF THEY COULD COUNT ON FIRM SUPPORT OF THE US FOR A FAIR ELECTORAL PROCESS, IF THEY HAD TO TAKE THIS STEP. I TOLD THEM THEY COULD HAVE MY

PERSONAL ASSURANCE, BUT I THOUGHT THE PRESIDENT'S ACTION IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC WAS EMPHATIC ASSURANCE OF WHERE THE US WOULD STAND ON THE QUESTION OF ELECTION FRAUD. MANTILLA SAID HE WAS UNEASY ENOUGH ABOUT THIS CONVERSATION AND COULD CLEARLY NOT REPEAT IT; WOULD I, THEREFORE, WITHOUT REFERRING TO THIS CONVERSATION SEE THAT PERHAPS THE VENEZUELAN, MEXICAN, AND ONE OR TWO OTHER LIKE-MINDED AMBASSADORS WERE AWARE OF THE GENERAL ISSUE? HE REITERATED THAT THIS WAS ONLY A PRECAUTION AND THAT HE WAS SOMEWHAT MORE OPTIMISTIC THAN I ABOUT AN ACCEPTABLY FAIR ELECTION RESULT.

6. MANTILLA SAID HE EXPECTED ABOUT 100 FOREIGN OBSERVERS, MOST OF THEM UNOFFICIAL, BUT ALL WERE INVITED AND WELCOME. HE WAS ESPECIALLY ANXIOUS TO HAVE OBSERVERS DESIGNATED BY THE OAS. HE OBVIOUSLY VIEWED A LARGE NUMBER OF INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS AS STRENGTHEN-  
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ING HIS POSITION.

7. COMMENT: WE HAVE GIVEN CONSIDERABLE THOUGHT TO WHAT BENCHMARKS WE CAN USE AFTER JULY 9 TO EVALUATE THE FAIRNESS OF THE ELECTION RESULT. WE HAVE A FEW PRIVATE POLLS, BUT THEY ARE UNFORTUNATELY TAKEN IN LA PAZ ONLY. ELECTORAL COURT PRESIDENT MANTILLA MAY BE ONE OF OUR BEST BENCHMARKS. HE IS HONEST, KNOWS THE SCRUFFY SITUATION HE IS DEALING WITH, AND APPEARS TO HAVE THE COURAGE TO MAKE A STRAIGHT CALL. INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS CAN PROBABLY DO NO MORE THAN STRENGTHEN MANTILLA'S HAND, BUT THIS MAY BE WORTH A GREAT DEAL. I PLAN TO TALK TO THE MINISTER OF INTERIOR AND PEREDA'S CAMPAIGN MANAGER ON THE GENERAL SUBJECT OF ELECTION INTEGRITY WITHIN THE NEXT FEW DAYS.  
BOEKER

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## Message Attributes

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